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JOSEPH NEEF AND PESTALOZZIANISM IN AMERICA.

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THE history of education in the United States is yet unwritten. Young as it is in years, many of the men and movements connected with its beginning are already forgotten or remembered only by a few special students. But when it comes to be written, Joseph Neef and his efforts to introduce Pestalozzianism in America, during the opening years of the present century, will be familiar to teachers generally. Today, scarcely a score of our professional educators know more than his name. Of the character and activities of this remarkable Alsacian—who fought with Napoleon, taught with Pestalozzi, and made the first contribution to a pedagogical literature in America—the present article is to deal. For it, the writer has taken possession of many widely scattered facts—the various accounts of Pestalozzi's work at Burgdorf, Owen's communistic movement at New Harmony, the excellent articles by Mr. Gardette¹⁾ and Mr. Wood,²⁾ the printed books of Neef, letters and other documents from his daughter—and these he has endeavored to weave into a continuous sketch. For the benefit of those who may be interested in the further study of this wonderful man, there has been appended a bibliography, to which the numbers in the body of the article refer. While he has admired the work of this pioneer disciple of Pestalozzi and seemed to make the touch of the critical finger somewhat gentle, he has withal, endeavored to indicate the limitations and mistakes of the subject of his memoir.

Francis Joseph Nicholas Neef was born at Soultz, Alsace, on the 6th of December, 1770. His father was a miller and destined his son for the priesthood; but when about twenty-one years old, young Neef gave up the idea of taking orders, and entered the French army under Napoleon. At the famous battle of Areole, Italy, in 1796, he was severely wounded and forced to retire from the military service. It was then that he turned his attention to education. When he joined Pestalozzi, is nowhere positively stated. In the Plan of Education he says: "About a year after Pestalozzi's school was established I became acquainted with him." The school at Burgdorf was opened in 1799, so that Neef must have joined Pestalozzi in 1800. The character of his teaching at Burgdorf is best given by Ramsaner⁽¹⁷⁾ who was a pupil of the school at the time. He says: "Buss had the scholars to sing whilst marching in time two and two, holding each other by the hand, in the large corridors of the castle. This was our chief pleasure; but our joy reached its climax when our gymnastic master Neef, with his peculiar charm, took part in it. This Neef was an old soldier who had fought in all parts of the world. He was a giant with a great beard, a crabbed face, a severe air, a rude exterior, but he was kindness itself. When he marched with the air of a trooper at the head of sixty or eighty children, his great voice thundering a Swiss air, then he enchanted the whole house. * * * * * I should say that Neef, in spite of the rudeness of his exterior, was the pupils' favorite, and for this reason he always lived with them and felt happiest when amongst them. He played, exercised, walked, bathed, climbed, threw stones with the scholars all in a childish spirit: this is how he had such unlimited authority over them. Meanwhile, he was not a pedagogue, he only had the heart of one."

Pestalozzi, having been chosen a member of the Helvetic consulta in 1802, was frequently called to Paris to settle disputes and look after interests involving Helvetia. A philanthropic society in Paris, learning of his method of instruction, induced him to send one of his teachers among them. Neef, because of his familiarity with the French and German languages, was chosen to conduct the Paris school. This school, a sort of orphanage, and not unlike the one that Pestalozzi was at the time conducting at Burgdorf, attracted general attention, and was visited by numerous distinguished educators and philanthropists, not a few of whom were Americans.

Pompée⁽¹⁶⁾ gives this account of Neef's Paris school and a visit to the same made by Napoleon: "Mons. Neef, a teacher of Burgdorf, was sent to Paris, and commenced teaching in the orphanage, where the administration of the benevolent institutions entrusted a certain number of children to him. Napoleon, wishing to see for himself the results, went to the orphanage accompanied by Tallyrand, the ambassador from the United States, and a large number of distinguished people; he left well satisfied with what he saw.

* * * * * Whilst all the governments of Europe were thinking of introducing a new system of teaching into the elementary schools, a private individual, Mr. McClure, conferred upon his country, the United States, an establishment that could vie with the most important schools of Europe. A singular chance led him toward the improvement of his country's instruction. In 1804 he was in Paris, and had a great desire to see Napoleon. He applied to the ambassador from the United States who took him to the meeting where Napoleon had gone to see the results of Neef's teaching of the orphans. During the whole time that the exercises were going on, McClure, absorbed in looking at Napoleon, saw nothing else; but, when going away, he heard Tallyrand say to Napoleon, It is too much for us. This remark struck him; he returned to the room and learned from Neef the object of the meeting; and, as he was deeply interested in the improvement of the condition of the poorer classes, he saw at once all that Pestalozzi's system could do to benefit their condition. He made a very favorable offer to Neef to go to Philadelphia, and later on to New Harmony to found a Pestalozzian Institute."

The circumstances and date of Mr. McClure's visit to Paris, as given by Neef⁽¹⁷⁾ himself, are as follows: "In the summer of 1805, Mr. William McClure, of Philadelphia, one of Pennsylvania's most enlightened sons, happened to visit Helvetia's interesting mountains and valleys. He was accompanied by Mr. C. Cabell, a brother of the present governor of Virginia. Pestalozzi's school attracted their notice. They repaired thither and to be soon convinced of the solidity, importance and usefulness of the Pestalozzi's method displayed before his eyes, and to form an unalterable wish of naturalizing it in his own country, were operations succeeding each other with such rapidity, that Mr. McClure took them for one and the same operation. As soon as he had returned to Paris, Mr. McClure sought and sent for me. 'On what terms,' said the

magnanimous patriot, 'would you go to my country, and introduce there your method of education? I have seen Pestalozzi, I know his system: my country wants it and will receive it with enthusiasm. I engage to pay your passage, to secure your livelihood. Go and be your master's apostle in the new world.' My soul was warmed with admiration at such uncommon generosity. Republican by inclination and principle, and of course not at all pleased with the new order of things that was established under my eyes, I was not only glad to quit Europe, but I burnt with desire to see that country, to live in it, to be useful to it which can boast of such citizens. But what still more heightens Mr. McClure's magnanimity is, that I did not at that period understand English at all. Two years at least were to be allowed for my acquiring a sufficient knowledge of the language of this land; during which space I had no other resource left but Mr. McClure's generosity. But neither this nor any other consideration could stagger his resolution. Thus it was that I became an inhabitant of the new world."

The following document, copied from the original kindly loaned to the writer by his daughter Mrs. Richard Owen, states clearly and briefly the agreement between Neef and McClure: "Professor Neef agrees to go to Pennsylvania in the U. S. of America and teach children after the methods of Pestalozzi for three years from the date of his arrival, in consequence of which Wm. MacLure agrees to pay Professor Neef's expenses from Paris to the U. S. of America to the amount of Three thousand Two hundred Livres Tournois, and to make good to Professor Neef whatever sum as salary he may receive for teaching said methods that falls short of Five hundred Dollars per Annum during the three years or the time Professor Neef may continue to teach the system of Pestalozzi. Paris, 19th March, 1806. WM. MACLURE." On the back of the same is the following: "Paris, 19th March, 1806. Received from Wm. MacLure Three thousand two hundred Livres Tournois in full for my expenses to the U. S. of America agreeable to the terms of the Within Engagement. NEEF." What broad humanitarianism! Well might Mr. MacLure's biographer^[7] say of him: "He devoted his talents and his wealth, not to the acquisition of a greater fortune, or personal aggrandizement, or sensual indulgence, but to the advancement of science and the amelioration of the condition of his fellow-men, born and living in circumstances not as favorable to happiness as himself."

Neef opened his school in Philadelphia in 1809, at the Falls of the Schuylkill, near where the Fairmount water works are now located. The school house was situated on a hill and near it were two other buildings, used as the dwelling house and dormitories. They were plainly built, of rough, substantial material, but they were well-ventilated and comfortable. On this spot, as Mr. Gardette tells us, Mr. Neef succeeded in collecting over one hundred pupils, most of them sons of the best families in and around Philadelphia, and nearly, but not quite, all of them boarders. A kinsman of Mr. Gardette^[1] has thus described this institution: "I lived at the school for four years (from my seventh to my eleventh). During this period I saw no book, neither was I taught my alphabet. The chief subjects taught us orally, were the languages, mathematics, and the natural sciences: and the idea was to make us understand the object and application of all we learned. * * * * * Our outdoor life was equally curious. We never wore hats, winter or summer, and many of us went barefooted also during the warm weather. Our master, hatless as ourselves, would lead us on long tramps through the adjacent country, talking, as we went, upon agriculture, botany, mineralogy and the like, in a pleasant, descriptive way, and pointing out to us their practical illustration in the grain fields, the gardens, the rocks and streams along our route. And wherever we came, we were always recognized by our bare heads and hardy habits as 'the Neef boys from the Falls.' We were encouraged in all athletic sports, were great swimmers and skaters, walkers and gymnasts. In the pleasant weather we went to bathe twice every day in the Schuylkill, with Neef, who was an accomplished swimmer, at our head. It was possibly owing to these amusements and exercises being taken in common with our master that there existed between Neef and his pupils a freedom so great as to be sometimes, I fear, slightly inconsistent with good breeding or the deference due from pupil to teacher. But this seemed to be a part of the system, and Mr. Neef was a thoroughly good-tempered, simple-mannered, and amiable man, without an atom of false pride or pedagogism." How like the characterization by Ramsaner!

The school was continued at the Falls of the Schuylkill for a little more than three years with great success, when it was removed to Village Green, Chester County. While here, among other pupils, was one David Glasgow Farragut, subsequently the

famous Admiral. But the change proved disastrous; and after a little more than a year, upon the advice of Dr. Galt, of Louisville, Kentucky, whose sons had been under Neef's tuition at Village Green, he moved his school thither. The Louisville school did not prosper as he had hoped. It was given up and he purchased a farm twenty-five miles from the city which he continued to operate until 1826 when Robert Owen induced him to go to New Harmony, Indiana, and join his community and supervise the schools of the same. A writer^[18] in the *American Journal of Education* (Boston) for March, 1827, says of the New Harmony school: "The system is the improved Pestalozzian; and of course they never attempt to teach children what they cannot comprehend. In consequence all kinds of dogmas of every sect or persuasion are banished from the schools, but the purest and unsophisticated morals are taught by example and precept. In the infant school a friendly feeling and equanimity of temper, kindness and mild disposition towards one another is taught more by example than precept." And Sir Rowland Hill^[6] in mentioning the same says: "Here is a specimen of the advantages of the system. The naturalists having made the children acquainted with their wants, the little creatures swarm over the woods, and bring in such an abundance of specimens that they are forming several immense collections, some of which they will present to new communities, and others will be exchanged for collections in other parts of the world." Mr. Dunn^[9] in an editorial on "New Harmony's Influence," in the Indianapolis *Sentinel*, says: "At the founding of the community William McClure, an educator and political economist of high attainments, and Joseph Neef, a disciple and associate of Pestalozzi, took charge of the mental and manual training of the colony. In addition to the school-room, frequent lectures were given on various subjects, and the most advanced methods of agriculture and all branches of industry were introduced. * * * * *

But beyond their immediate labors, there was certainly an educational influence in the New Harmony work that must have been widely felt."

But the New Harmony community was given up in 1828 and Mr. Neef removed to Cincinnati and later to Steubenville, Ohio, where he conducted a school for a short time. In 1834 he returned to New Harmony where he continued to live up to the time of his death, April 8, 1854. Robert Dale Owen^[15] in his

autobiographical sketches has this to say of him: "Simple, straight-forward, and cordial, a proficient in modern languages, a good musician, he had brought with him from Pestalozzi's institution an excellent mode of teaching. To his earlier life, as an officer under Napoleon, was due a blunt, off-hand manner and an abrupt style of speech, enforced, now and then, with an oath—an awkward habit for a teacher, which I think he tried ineffectually to get rid of. One day, when I was within hearing, a boy in his class used profane language. 'Youngster,' said Neef to him, 'you mustn't swear. It's silly and its vulgar, and it means nothing. Don't let me hear you do so again.' 'But, Mr. Neef,' said the boy, hesitating, and looking half-frightened, 'if—if its vulgar and wrong to swear, why—' 'Well, out with it! Never stop when you want to say anything: that is another bad habit. You wished to know why—' 'why you swear yourself, Mr. Neef?' 'Because I'm a d——d fool. Don't you be one, too.' With all his roughness, the good old man was a general favorite alike with children and adults. Those whose recollections of Harmony extend back thirty years preserve a genial remembrance of him walking about in the sun of July or August, in linen trousers and shirt, always bare-headed, sometimes barefooted, with a grandchild in his arms, and humming to his infant charge some martial air, in a wonderful bass voice, which, it is said, enabled him, in his younger days, when giving commands to a body of troops, to be distinctly heard by ten thousand men."

Neef was married July 5, 1803, to Eloisa Buss, sister of Johannes Buss, teacher of geometry and drawing in Pestalozzi's school. The ceremony was performed in the old castle at Burgdorf and was witnessed by Pestalozzi, his wife, and other members of the institution. Johannes Buss had two of his brothers in Pestalozzi's school; and, being desirous of having his sister educated there also, he induced Madame Pestalozzi to take Eloisa under her charge. She was taught there privately for three years—the school being exclusively for boys—and Neef was her teacher of French. In his *Plan of Education* he thus speaks of her: "Mistress Neef, according to what she very often tells me, and I of course must believe, is an excellent contriver in housekeeping; she shall, therefore, be entrusted with the management of our domestic affairs. Like the honest Vicar of Wakefield, I chose my wife not for a glossy surface, but such other qualities as I thought

would wear well. I shall bestow no further eulogy upon said lady, lest my reader should imagine I am still in love with her, which would be a very unfashionable mistake indeed. No husband who has outlived the honeymoon will be astonished at this assertion of mine, as soon as he shall know that I have been married these five long years."

That Mrs. Neef had her share of trouble with her simple-hearted pedagogical husband, is evidenced by this incident told by one of his Philadelphia pupils: "Mr. Neef had no inclination for society, and, on occasions when it became necessary that he should visit the city, his wife, an excellent and notable woman, would tie a cravat (which he habitually went without) round his neck, and slap a hat on his head, much to his disgust and annoyance. 'Alas!' he would exclaim at such times with a mock resignation; 'must I again have the rope round my neck.' It usually happened, on these excursions citywards, that, taking off his hat in the stage or at the first halt on his route, he forgot all about that superfluous article, and would return to his good lady hatless as usual. And if the day had been warm, the cravat generally shared the fate of the hat. To guard against these frequently recurring losses, Mrs. Neef had recourse, finally, to the plan of attaching her husband's name and address inside the crown of his headgear."

Those who knew Neef well describe him as being "a man of unusual abilities and eccentric character, a profound scholar, a deep and original thinker, a thorough philosopher, and a sincere, honest man." In personal appearance he was "firm-knit, sinewy, compact of form, with a bright, dark eye, and close-cut, coal-black hair, the figure and gait of a well-drilled, graceful soldier, the face of a Roman Tribune, the mind of a sage, and the heart of a child." The same writer⁽⁴⁾ says: "Though possessing agreeable manners, Mr. Neef had no inclination for society." He was a member of the Masonic order as is indicated by a certificate issued August 12, 1815, by "the Worshipful Master and Officers of Lodge No. 69, held in the Borough of Chester, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania" and certifying that "Brother Joseph Neef was regularly Entered, Passed, and Raised to the Sublime degree of a Master Mason in our Lodge." Another document states that "At a meeting of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, held on the 4th day of the 6th month (June) 1812, Joseph Neef of the Falls of the Schuylkill was duly elected a

corresponding member." These and other documents, preserved by Mrs. Owen and placed at the disposition of the writer, show a breadth of interest and sympathy hardly to be expected from one of his peculiar temperament.

Although Christopher Dock's *Schul-Ordnung* is the oldest book in America on the art of teaching, it was printed in German and has only lately been translated. Neef's *Plan of Education* may be said to be the first strictly pedagogical book written and published in the new world. The full title reads: *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education founded on the Analysis of the Human Faculties and Natural Reason, suitable for the offspring of a Free People and for all Rational Beings.* By Joseph Neef, formerly a co-adjutor of Pestalozzi at his school near Berne, Switzerland. Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1808. pp. 168.

In the preface the author pays this tribute to his master: "There lives in Europe, beneath the foot of the Alps, an old man whose name is Pestalozzi, a man as respectable for goodness of his heart as for the soundness of his head. This man endowed by nature, or rather nature's god, with the felicity of an observing mind, was forcibly struck by the vices, follies, and extravagancies of the superior ranks, and the ignorance, superstition, and debasement of the inferior ranks of society. He perceived that from these impure sources flowed all the miseries that afflicted his unhappy fellow-creatures. Being no disciple of Zeno, the woes of his brethren naturally imparted their anguish to his sensible heart. The host of calamities, under which he saw his fellow-men groining, deeply grieved his feeling soul, and the gulf of evils, into which he viewed mankind plunged, called forth the most cordial and sincere compassion. Tears fell from his mourning eyes but they were manly tears. Far from being disheartened by such a sad spectacle, he had the courage to enquire into the causes of human misery: he went even a step farther and endeavored to find out a wholesome remedy, calculated to destroy at their very source those evils which inundate the world. * * * * * He therefore established a school. Other men, animated by his philosophical enthusiasm, joined him: and thus began a work which will render Pestalozzi's name as dear and venerable to posterity as the deeds of many of his contemporaries will render them execrable to future generations. * * * * * About a year after Pestalozzi's school was established, I became acquainted with him and his

noble undertaking. Previously I had read several of his writings and admired both his profound reasoning powers and generous sentiments. By the interference of some of our mutual friends I became one of his disciples, or if you please, collaborators."

Then follows a brief account of his meeting with Mr. Maclure, already alluded to, and a discussion of the scope of education. The first chapter after this introduction discusses Speech or Speaking. In this he makes a plea for the study of natural objects. "To unfold any faculty whatever we must exercise it, and to exercise it we must possess means fitted for exercising it. And these means we have in abundance. Let us but open up our eyes. The whole cabinet of nature, beings and objects, animate and inanimate, obtrude themselves as it were on us; and yet how neglected they are! how little use is made of our faculties and these invaluable means!" The second chapter—one of the longest—discusses Numbers and Calculation. He distinguishes between calculating and cyphering, and urges early objective instruction in the former. "As it is evident that all our numerical notions proceed from objects, we shall of course begin our studies by them. Easily movable things, as beans, peas, little stones, marbles, small boards shall be our first instructors." The third chapter is given to Geometry and the fourth to Drawing. To both of these subjects he attaches an importance comparable with that of the best educators of our own day. Chapter five is given to Reading and Writing. In this the unphonetic character of English speech gets a good deal of just condemnation. The sixth chapter discusses Grammar and the seventh chapter Ethics or Morals. In the latter the Golden Rule furnishes the basis of his instruction. Natural History, Natural Philosophy, and Chemistry are discussed in the three succeeding chapters. The value of each of these is strongly stated and methods of teaching them clearly set forth. "Our arts and sciences are only to be looked upon as means by which the natural faculties of the growing man should be gradually brought to their maturity."

Gymnastics or Exercise is the title of chapter eleven. This, it will be remembered, was one of the subjects taught by him in Pestalozzi's school at Burgdorf; and the importance of systematic bodily exercise is here stated with great clearness. Methods of teaching Greek, Latin, and French are given in chapter twelve. Music, Poetry, Geography, and Lexicology are considered in the

next four chapters, and in conclusion the author discusses somewhat briefly the internal management of his ideal school. "It would be next to insulting the good sense of my readers should I attempt to tell them upon what footing I shall be with my pupils, for they know enough of me and my system to perceive that the grave, doctorial, magisterial, and dictorial tone shall never insult their ears : and that they shall never hear of a cat o' nine tails : that I shall be nothing else but their friend and guide, their school-fellow, play-fellow, and messmate." And all this his students tell us he was to them.

The closing paragraph of the book is sadly prophetic of the author's subsequent career. "Should my project of forming my own school miscarry, then the director of some already established seminary will perhaps please to accept my service : and if this should not be the case, I shall in all likelihood find out some remote, obscure village, whose hardy youth want a schoolmaster. Hear it, ye men of the world ! To become an obscure, useful, country schoolmaster is the highest pitch of my worldly ambition."

Neef's second published book was a translation of Condillac's *Logic*. The full title reads : *The Logic of Condillac*. Translated by Joseph Neef as an illustration of the Plan of Education established at his School near Philadelphia. Philadelphia, 1809. pp. 138. It is a literal translation without notes or comments by the translator. His third book was : *The Method of Instructing Children Rationally in the Arts of Writing and Reading*. By Joseph Neef. Philadelphia, 1813. In this book he elaborates his ideas on the teaching of reading and writing outlined in his *Plan of Education*. In the preface he writes : "Whether my plan be good or bad, better or worse than others, is to be decided by those who make proper trial of it : and to them I dedicate the following instructions for teachers." His daughter writes⁽¹³⁾ that he also wrote a book giving his method of teaching the French language, but the manuscript never was printed.

Of Neef's influence as an educator but few traces remain. His books on education—excellent pedagogical treatises—have fallen into undeserved neglect and are now out of print. The number of students under his charge was never large at any one time : and these, if distinguished at all, were not in educational lines. That his teachings bore the scientific impress, is witnessed by all who have left records of his work. Dr. Wickersham⁽¹⁴⁾ says of his

school at the Falls of the Schuylkill: "It was governed without punishment of any kind. The pupils used no books but were taught orally and mainly in the open air. Frequent excursions were taken, that instruction might be fresh from the book of nature. Mr. Calkins⁽²⁾ thinks that the cause of Neef's apparent inability to markedly influence the educational activities of the New World was because "he failed to comprehend the necessity of Americanizing the Pestalozzian system instead of merely transplanting it." But a somewhat careful study of Neef's books and of his actual teaching does not sustain Mr. Calkin's point. Two other and different reasons seem more conclusive to the present writer: His work lacked permanency. Had he remained in Philadelphia where he received a large measure of success and where his ideas were appreciated and endorsed, his name today might be one of the best known in the annals of American education. But he was easily discouraged and easily persuaded, and too often followed the advice of well-meaning but carelessly-informed friends. There is, however, a deeper meaning to be attached to Neef's seeming failure: he came to America twenty-five years too soon. At the time of his coming, only a few generous souls like Maclure were interested in the improvement of the schools. The renaissance in American education had not yet begun. A quarter of a century later, the intellectual revival which ushered into active service such men as Henry Barnard, Horace Mann, Walter Johnson, Thomas Gallaudet, and James Wadsworth, would have given Joseph Neef foremost rank in the great movement which developed the American public school.

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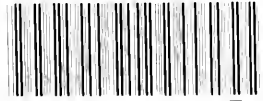
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